18-20 Year-Olds Fail To Register

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After a controversial battle to enable youths between the ages of 18 and 20 to vote, not one registered to exercise the new privilege on the first day of registration yesterday, E. Robert Bowlus, secretary of the Board of Elections Superviser reported.

Although youths wil have more time to register, until the next election when the books are closed, Bowlus said he was surprised and confused about these results.

Based on population estimates for the county, between 4,000 and 4,500 young people fall into the 18 to 20 year old age bracket and, according to the Voting Rights Act passed in the last session of Congress, are eligible to become registered voters.

In a directive issued in July, the state Board of Elections instructed local election offices to accept registrations by 18-year-olds. A challenge of the legality of the Voting Rights Act is presently being considered by the U.S. Supreme Court, but until a ruling is made, state elections officials will proceed on the assumption that the act is legal.

Arguments in the case were heard by the court in October, but no decision has been rendered. If the high court decides to strike down the congressional act, ruling that a change in the voting age would have to be accomplished through constitutional amendment, the names of 18 - year - olds registered in Maryland would be removed from the books.

Meanwhile, local election officials will register anyone who meets the residency requirements and who will be 18 years old prior to the next election. The local office, on the lower level of Winchester Hall, is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and on Mondays from 1 to 8:30 p.m.